

**Department of Health & Human Services
Health Care Financing Administration
Operational Policy Letter #92
OPL99.092**

Date: May 3, 1999

Subject: Telecommunications Requirements: Migration of Medicare Managed Care Organizations (MCO) to the Medicare Data Communications Network and the Replacement of the RLINK Software

Background

Medicare-contracting MCOs are required to connect to the HCFA Data Center (HDC) to conduct a number of Medicare business functions. First, all Medicare MCOs electronically transmit beneficiary enrollment, disenrollment, and correction data in batch mode to the HDC. MCOs also access the Managed Care Option Information (MCCOY) system to obtain data associated with the receipt and disposition of their transactions, as well as the GHP Report Output User Communication Help (GROUCH) to retrieve monthly reports containing data supporting plan membership and payments. Currently, MCOs access the HDC for these purposes via RENEX/RLINK, Network Data Mover (NDM) PC, or NDM Mainframe.

Second, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA) mandated that all risk-based MCOs submit encounter data related to the inpatient hospital stays of their members. To facilitate the submission of encounter data to HCFA, these MCOs were connected to the Medicare Data Communications Network (MDCN) in 1998. Linkage to the MDCN enables risk-based MCOs to transmit their encounter data to the HDC utilizing the Common Working File (CWF) and fiscal intermediary (FI) systems.

Third, MCOs will be required to access HCFA's Health Plan Management System (HPMS). The HPMS is an information system as well as a data exchange mechanism for data related to Medicare managed care health plans. As the HPMS develops, it will collect and manage plan benefits and copayments, quality measure data from the Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set (HEDIS), customer satisfaction data from the Consumer Assessment of Health Plans Survey (CAHPS), disenrollment data, appeals, the Health Outcomes Survey (HOS), plan financial information, and physician incentive reporting. The HPMS is being developed as a web browser-based user interface. Linkage to the MDCN will

support the plan communication to the HPMS data beginning after the plan contract year 2000 data collection cycle. Please direct any questions to the HPMS HELP desk at 1-800-220-2028.

Migration of MCOs to the Medicare Data Communications Network

To establish a single method of access to the HDC, HCFA is requiring **all MCOs** (i.e., those with Medicare+Choice (M+C), cost, health care prepayment, and demonstration contracts) to migrate to the MDCN to accomplish their Medicare business functions. These Medicare business functions include the transmission of beneficiary enrollment, disenrollment, and correction data, the submission of encounter data, and access to the HPMS.

The MDCN is a network maintained by IBM Global Services (IGS) to support telecommunications between HCFA and its Medicare contractors. It replaces the FTS 2000 phone line access to the HDC that was previously used. The fee-for-service carriers and FIs and most of the M+C organizations (M+CO) are already operating on this network. The remaining MCOs must be migrated to the MDCN, as HCFA will be discontinuing FTS 2000 phone line access.

HCFA will transition the remaining MCO users to the MDCN **beginning April 1, 1999 through June 30, 1999**. On July 1, 1999, all HDC access must occur by means of the MDCN. As a result, linkage to the MDCN becomes an ongoing requirement for any MCO obtaining a new Medicare contract.

Attachments

Contact: HCFA Regional Office Managed Care Contact

This OPL was prepared by the Center for Health Plans and Providers.

The attached instructions explain the installation of the IGS Dialer and how to access the MDCN.

Replacement of RLINK Software

Because it fails to meet mandated security requirements, HCFA will no longer support the RLINK data transmission tool as of **July 1, 1999**. At that time, the supporting RENEX protocol converters resident at the HDC will be taken out of service. HCFA is replacing RLINK with a web browser-based TN3270 client accessed by Microsoft Internet Explorer Version 4.0 (IE 4.0) or greater with 128-bit encryption. This requires an operating system of Windows95 or greater. This tool is an emulator that will allow MCOs to conduct mainframe sessions to both transmit and view data as is done currently (via RLINK).

The rollout of the TN3270 client began with new users who applied for dial-up access to the HDC on January 31, 1999. HCFA will convert all existing users to the new tool by June 30, 1999. MCOs that utilize NDM to submit their managed care data, will not be required to use the TN3270 client access method to transmit. HCFA will continue to support the NDM method of access for those users for data transmission purposes only. **Please note, however, that NDM users that utilize RLINK to view/download their data must use the TN3270 client tool to perform that function.**

The attached instructions explain the IE 4.0 download process and how to access the TN3270 client.

Telecommunication Requirements for Medicare Business Functions

The following sections will define the telecommunications requirements related to each of the Medicare business functions described above.

A. Access to the HDC: MCCOY and GROUCH

RLINK Users

Current RLINK users will need:

- an IGS Dialer to access the MDCN and
- Internet Explorer 4.0 to access the TN3270 client.

The TN3270 client will allow MCOs to conduct HDC mainframe sessions to transmit/view/download data per MCCOY/TSO-GROUCH. This access pathway will require a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) connectivity which can be provided to MCOs by IGS.

NDM Users

Current NDM users (PC and Mainframe) will need:

- an IGS Dialer to access the MDCN. (NOTE: Mainframe NDM users may not require the IGS dialer for access.)

From that point, there are access options depending on whether PC or Mainframe NDM is being used. IGS can provide information regarding the best connection method. This access pathway will require a Systems Network Architecture (SNA) connectivity which can be provided to MCOs by IGS.

B. Access to HPMS

MCOs will need:

- an IGS Dialer to access the MDCN (NOTE: MCOs with leased lines may not require the dialer.) and
- Internet Explorer 4.0 to access the HPMS.

This access pathway will require a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) connectivity which can be provided to MCOs by IGS.

C. Access to Encounter Data Collection FIs

M+COs will need:

- an IGS Dialer or leased line to access the MDCN.

If the MCO has a lease line connection to the FI, the IGS dialer is not necessary. From the point that MDCN connectivity is established, the FI can provide further instructions regarding access to their system.

Impact on Litton Computer Services and MCI World Com Advanced Networks

MCOs who contract with a third party for the transmission of membership information to the HDC may continue to do so but **must still establish an IGS account and TCP/IP connectivity to the MDCN in order to access the HPMS and to submit encounter data.** In order to meet HCFA requirements, Litton Computer Services and MCI World Com Advanced Networks must also establish connectivity to the MDCN.

Conversion of HCFA IGS Accounts to MCO Commercial IGS Accounts

All M+COs currently connected to the MDCN must ensure that they have established **commercial** network accounts with IGS. As described in OPL #70, HCFA initially bore the cost for these MCOs to establish a TCP/IP connection for the purposes of transmitting encounter data. In September 1998, IGS provided Customer New Account Profile information, which contained an Attachment for IBM Network Services and a Customer Agreement, to these MCOs. By November 1998, these HCFA accounts should have been transformed into individual MCO commercial accounts. MCOs must execute the Profile, Attachment, and Agreement and return to IGS immediately to avoid interruptions in telecommunication services. **HCFA discontinued its accounts for these MCOs in November 1998. MCOs who fail to convert their IGS accounts immediately will have no access to the MDCN and will be unable to meet their Medicare business function requirements.** Please contact IGS at 1-800-905-2069 if you did not receive the account information or if you have any questions.

HCFA Data Center and IGS User IDs

All MCOs will require two sets of user IDs and passwords to access the MDCN: a HITS (HCFA Identification Tracking System) user ID/password and an IGS user ID/password. MCOs should contact the Managed Care Plan Communications Team at 410-786-7613 to obtain information on the process for requesting HITS user IDs. MCOs should contact IGS at 1-800-905-2069 to request IGS user IDs, passwords, and account information. IGS will provide these elements to the MCOs upon establishment of an IGS account. Please note that the HITS user ID is separate and distinct from the IGS network user ID.

Information Regarding the Establishment of MDCN Connectivity - MDCN Access Options

As stated previously, most MCOs are already connected to the MDCN. The following information is for those MCOs who are not yet on the network to consider when discussing their access options with IGS. There are 3 main options:

- MCOs without existing IGS connectivity who require larger transmission volumes can contract for leased lines (@ an estimated \$2025 for installation/\$700 per month ongoing).
- MCOs without existing IGS connectivity who require lower transmission volumes can contract for dial-up accounts (@ a minimal setup charge/\$4 per transmission hour ongoing).
- MCOs with existing IGS connectivity can have HDC access applied to their IGS network user ID profile.

It is important that MCOs provide information to IGS regarding their current telecommunication situation. This information will enable IGS to establish the appropriate connectivity for your business needs. IGS will be contacting all non MCOs and recontacting MCOs to ensure that the current telecommunications orientation will meet HCFA requirements.

Contact Information

If you have general questions about the information contained in this OPL, please contact Kim Miegel at 410-786-3311 or Ed Howard at 410-768-6368.

If you have technical questions about the MDCN up to the point of login to the HDC, please contact the IGS Help Desk at 1-800-905-2069.

If you have technical questions regarding TN3270 access and operation, please contact the HCFA Data Center Action Desk at 410-786-2580.

If you have HDC access questions, please contact the Managed Care Plan Communications Team at 410-786-7613.

If you have HPMS access questions, please contact the HPMS Help Desk at 1-800-220-2028.